

Dear Comrade (working title)

South Korea / Japan / Vietnam

LEE Yoon-ki



Genre: Drama
Format: HD
Estimated Running Time: 120 min.

Budget:
US\$ 3,000,000 (HK\$ 23,400,000)

Producers:
TOYOYAMA Yuki
Sean SHIN

Writing Credit:
LEE Yoon-ki

Production Company:
Esprit Inc.

HAF Goals:
Funds, Sales agents

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INTRODUCTION

This story is set in the middle of the 20th Century, a time of extremes when countries were divided by war. In the midst of this hatred, humanity was falling into chaos. One man kept on trying to cross the border separating two socialist states, Vietnam and North Korea. This film tells the story of a Vietnamese man's love for a North Korean woman which lasted for over 31 years.

SYNOPSIS

Fall, 2002. A 54 year old Vietnamese man named Vinh waits in the empty hallways of the DPRK embassy in Hanoi. He's tense, nervous and holding a sweat-dampened stack of documents.

In the early 1970's, North Vietnam formed an alliance with North Korea which shared the same goal of embracing socialism to run their countries. While North Vietnam was at war with South Vietnam, which was aided by the US, the more advanced socialist country offered them support in many ways and educating their students was one of them. But the governments of the two countries forbade their citizens to marry foreigners; they are not even allowed to fall in love. In 1971, the population of Vietnamese students in North Korea has risen to 600, and Vinh is one of them.

One day in Pyongyang he met a North Korean woman named Soo-young. He was 23, she was 24 and he fell in love at first sight. He yearned to talk to her, but when they passed each other he couldn't find the words and quickly looked away. Even though he spoke fluent Korean he could not bring himself to speak to her. The problem was not language, it was that both the Vietnamese and the North Korean governments forbade relationships with foreigners, let alone marriage.

Finally he can contain himself no longer and arranges an "accidental" meeting with Soo-young in one of the empty halls of the factory where they work. "Are you happy?" he asks her. She's astounded yet responds, "I'm happy." And that was their entire encounter, but afterwards she fell for Vinh in return, secretly looking for him every day at the factory. No one could know they were in love and since they had to keep their relationship secret, they chose Soo-young's home for their rendezvous. But Vinh's time in North Korea comes to an end in 1972 and he has to return to Vietnam. Reluctantly, they say goodbye.

Back in Hanoi, Vinh can't forget Soo-young. One day he receives a letter from her in which she tells him that she, too, misses him deeply. Secretly they correspond for years. Vinh gets chances to go to North Korea in 1978 and 1982 and each time he meets her for brief encounters during which they renew

their relationship and vow never to forget one another. In 1986, the Vietnamese government issues a new economic policy called the Doi Moi Reform which allows marriage with foreigners. In 1992, Vinh finally musters the courage to make his move, visiting the DPRK embassy in Hanoi to apply for permission to marry Soo-young. But the North Korean government doesn't allow her to leave the country and Vinh is worried about her situation in North Korea. Worse than that, there are no more letters from her anymore.

Determined to use any means necessary to convince both governments to let them marry, he is finally allowed to state his case to the president of Vietnam during his official visit to Pyongyang in 2002. We now come back to the present day as the embassy staff calls Vinh's name and he enters the room in the DPRK embassy. Soo-young is inside. He can't believe it. "Are you happy?" she asks him. "I'm happy," he answers. For the first time in its history, the North Korean government gives one of its citizens an exit permit. Vinh and Soo-young finally marry, 35 years after they first met.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

This film is about two lovers who can't meet when they want to see each other, who can't talk on the phone when they want to hear each other's voice, who can't even exchange letters. And yet their love endures this situation for over 30 years. Is it really possible to love someone so deeply, especially today? I live in the 21st century, and it is hard for me to imagine how deep, genuine and true their love must be. But their love is true, just like this story is true.

The most basic human right is to live. In reality, we endure so much due to national ideology and Vinh and Soo-young endure so much due to their situation, but their sincerity and bravery shows us the real meaning of love, and their love had the power to change their states. This film project began with the idea of introducing this powerful and touching story to as many people as possible. To me, the only way to settle the complicated issues of this world are through individual acts of love and peacemaking.

DIRECTOR

Born in Korea, director LEE Yoon-ki worked as an assistant director on films like LEE Myung-se's *Their Last Love Affair*, KWAK Je-yong's *The Day of Rain Falls Like Watercolor* and then, in 2004, he directed his first feature film, *This Charming Girl*, which won prizes both for its director and for its leading actress. He later directed the well-regarded television drama, *The House That I Lived*. His other films include *My Dear Enemy*, *Love Talk* and *Ad-Lib Night* all of which were invited to numerous film festivals like the Pusan International Film Festival, the Berlin International Film Festival, the Deauville Asian Film Festival and the Karlovy Vary Film Festival.

PRODUCERS

TOYOYAMA Yuki was born in Tokyo and after her graduation she worked as a production assistant on many music videos and short films in Los Angeles. Returning to Japan in 1995, she became a production assistant and then an assistant producer on films like *Swallowtail Butterfly*, *Quartet* and *Bubble Fiction: Boom or Bust*. She also worked as a casting director on films such as *Fast and Furious 3: Tokyo Drift* and *Aegis*. She also produced the films *Graduation* and *Shinkokyu no Hitsuyo* among others. In 2003, she established Esprit Inc.

Born in Seoul, Korea, Sean SHIN first graduated from the department of Japanese Language at Korea Inha University in 1993 and went on to study Japanese Culture and Language at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand. He then started working as a coordinator shooting music videos and documentary films in New Zealand and Japan. He moved to Japan in 2001, worked in various producers' roles on films such as *Virgin Snow* (2006), *The Boat* (2009) and *Higanjima* (2010). He was appointed as the chief producer of media company Sevensseas Holdings in Tokyo in 2009.

PRODUCTION COMPANY

Esprit Inc was founded to plan and develop film projects as well as to provide production support and to import and export films, television programs and multi-media content. Its projects include *Dear Comrade* (working title) and *Golem Running*.